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FALL FOOD PREVIEW

Consumers can look forward to relatively stable food prices at the supermarket for the rest of this year--compared with the increases they saw earlier in 1977. For all of 1977, food prices at grocery stores probably will average around 6 percent above 1976 levels. Prices for food in eating places are likely to average 7 or 8 percent higher for the year, so the average price increase for all food is expected to be slightly higher than 6 percent.

Shoppers strolling along the meat counter will see little change from summer in red meat prices this fall, although retail prices of Choice grade beef are expected to rise some by December. Pork prices, expected to go down, will still be slightly higher than a year earlier.

Farther down the meat counter, shoppers will probably see the usual seasonal drop in prices for chicken and turkey. But prices for whole, ready-to-cook frying chicken are likely to stay a little above the 55 cents a pound shoppers were paying last October-December, and an 8-16 pound frozen turkey during the holiday season probably will cost slightly more than a year ago.

Fish prices are steadily going uphill. Current supplies appear to be adequate, but some fish items will be a little short late in the year. Consumer demand for fish continues strong. Fish prices in 1977 probably will average 10 percent higher than last year--a considerable hike compared with the price change for most other foods.

Dairy prices are expected to rise moderately this fall. There will be ample supplies of most products in the dairy cases, since milk production during the summer was the largest since 1965--and 2 percent more than last summer. Any increases in retail dairy prices will be caused primarily by higher processing and marketing costs and by higher dairy support prices put into effect last spring.

Egg prices are likely to climb a bit in the months ahead, but not as sharply as they did last fall and winter.

Potato prices are down sharply from their June peak, as a result of seasonally larger supplies. With a large fall harvest in sight, potato prices probably will continue to slide, barring adverse weather. Sweet potato users probably will pay higher prices since prospective supplies of sweet potatoes are down 11 percent from last year.

Consumers will find more normal supplies of most other fresh vegetables following last winter's disruptive Florida freeze. Most vegetable prices will probably continue steady through the fall. Salads can be dressed a little less expensively during the coming months, as vegetable oils will cost slightly less.

Fresh fruit lovers will find somewhat lower seasonal prices in the months ahead. Even so, prices will still be above last year's levels. Harvesting for the important apple crop has now begun. Even though this year's apple harvest is forecast to be about 8 percent larger than last year's crop, strong demand from processors and exporters probably will keep prices near last year's levels. Retail prices for Valencia oranges will go up as supplies dwindle until the new citrus season gets underway. Shoppers can look for an abundance of grapes this autumn. There will not be as many peaches as there were last year, and there might be some higher pear prices, since pear production is down by about 11 percent from 1976.

Along the frozen and canned vegetable aisles, there will be generous supplies of canned corn and of all the tomato products: canned tomatoes, catsup, tomato juice, paste and sauce. Canned and frozen snap beans and limas will also be in good supply.

Retail prices for canned and frozen fruits will be somewhat higher. There will be ample supplies of frozen strawberries. Drinkers of frozen orange juice will find that supplies are still tight due to last winter's freeze and continued heavy consumer demand. Fewer fresh oranges were available, so consumers turned to juice. Again, higher costs of producing, processing, and marketing will increase prices for frozen orange juice.

Large supplies and relatively low farm prices for grains and other major ingredients will prevent any substantial price hikes for cereals and bakery goods this fall.

Prices for sugar and sweets will probably rise moderately later this fall, reflecting the continued increases in prices for chocolate products and some anticipated increases in raw sugar prices.

You may have already noticed that the upward swing in retail prices for coffee ended in June--bringing on the first real decline for coffee prices in almost 2 years. Those high prices cut consumption. This, along with a substantial recovery in coffee production, caused wholesale prices to fall sharply during the summer. Consequently, retail prices are expected to drop further this fall, but probably not as quickly as they rose last winter and spring.

The soft drink industry was the second largest American market for sugar last year, trailing only household use. Consumers spent almost \$10½ billion on soft drinks in 1976, equal to 31 gallons per American. Economists expect us to consume 5 percent more soft drinks this year. The favorite flavor is still cola with lemon-lime in a distant second. Soft drink prices have increased some during the year and are expected to go up a bit further.

Dried peas and lentils will be in short supply in the months ahead, due to crop damage in the Palouse area in Washington and Idaho, which is the Nation's only source of these items. Stored supplies of dried peas will be sharply reduced, although this doesn't mean a direct shortage to the American consumer.

A major portion of the dried pea supply is exported; however, consumer prices have responded to the shorter supplies and are moving sharply upward. Consumers might want to substitute dried beans, which will be in plentiful supply and will stay within their normal price range.

There will be record almond supplies for holiday munching. Walnut producers are shelling out 9 percent more walnuts than last year. It seems that consumers are eating more almonds and Macadamia nuts these days, although economists say that per capita consumption of all tree nuts hasn't changed much in recent years.

There will be plenty of cranberries to spark holiday meals, even though the cranberry crop is 10 percent smaller than last year. The smaller supplies will mean somewhat higher cranberry prices at the store. Ironically, the price increases will be especially apparent in the East where most cranberries are grown and where consumer demand is higher than in other parts of the country. A freezing winter and a hot dry summer cut the eastern cranberry production but didn't diminish the consumer demand.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

It's Where And How You Live. It is important to understand our environment and how our actions affect it. After all, any influence on our environment is hitting us where we live. USDA's Forest Service has developed several publications designed to help people become environmentally aware. The materials are suitable for classroom use, in projects or lessons for clubs, community organizations, or even family activities. They include:

"Investigating Your Environment" is a series of lesson plans designed to help teachers and students observe their surrounding and collect, record, and interpret data. The plans can help individuals develop the skills and motivation necessary to interact with their environment at many different levels. The packet was developed for use in grades 7-12.

"Investigating Your Community Environment" encourages you to become aware of your community. A series of investigations, explained in the pamphlet, can help you to understand why certain things affecting your quality of life exist--land use in your community, traffic patterns, public facilities and services--and how you can work toward improving the quality of life for yourself and your community. The pamphlet is suitable for individual or group use from ages 14 through adult.

"Woodsy Owl Environmental Education Teacher's Kit" helps young children discover the way nature looks, sounds, and feels. They tackle environmental projects and feel accomplishment by creating a better place to live. Each kit contains background information, lesson plans, and teaching aids. The lessons are adapted for children in grades 1-6.

The publications are available free from the Office of Information, Forest Service, USDA, Box 2417, Washington, D.C. 20013.

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Environmental Pick-Me-Up. Litter on public lands costs taxpayers an estimated \$500 million a year. All kinds of campaigns have been launched to help solve the problem. Education, persuasion, litter bags, penalties, and fines have all been tried. But litter is still a persistent and annoying problem. In an attempt to help its personnel fight litter, USDA's Forest Service has evolved an incentive system. The system involves the public, especially children, and rewards them for a job well done. Any individual or group could adapt and use the system to help clean up parks, picnic area, playgrounds, and school yards. For single free copies of "How To Control Litter In Recreation Areas: The Incentive System," write to the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, 809 N.E. 6th Avenue, Box 3141, Portland, Oregon 97208.

WHEN YOU BRING HOME YOUR CATCH

The Five Percent Solution. According to the USDA booklet, "Freezing Meat And Fish In The Home," it is a good idea to give fish steaks and fillets a 30-second dip in a 5-percent solution before wrapping and freezing. To make a 5-percent solution use 2/3 cup salt to 1 gallon of water,

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